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ABSTRACT

The English methods class should become a supportive group which encourages the introduction of real feelings, thoughts, and experiences into the learning process. Once a base of common personal experiences is established, direction can be focused inward through the use of the journal. Journal entries can provide a forum for the expression of students' reactions to reading, to classroom experiences, and to other experiences. The methods class, in short, becomes a model for the kind of cooperation and self-awareness which is essential to good teaching. (KS)

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AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN THE METHODS CLASS: Basic Horticulture and the Growing of a Teacher

Dan R. Kirby

I'm terribly susceptible to Presidential rhetoric. I remember when Lyndon Johnson said he wouldn't run again; I was almost moved to tears even though I'd been in the streets crusading for him to say that. When Jerry Ford said, "take all you want but eat all you take," I laughed a lot, but I began cleaning my plate. In that same way, I guess, I became a home gardener-you remember the WIN garden? Thanks to Jerry's suggestion I found out I can grow a better than average tomato. And between the white flies and the cutworms I can almost break even. Recently while spanning the globe in my search for more advanced growing techniques, I ran into a former student who invited me out for a tour of her new greenhouse. This was a freaky former student who had tried teaching for a year and decided organic farming was more creative, and the pay turned out to be about the same.

As I toured that small greenhouse and listened to her latest discoveries about Zen and horticulture, I began to realize I had a lot to learn. As if to test me after she finished the lecture, she held up two tomato plants. "Which one is the healthier plant?", she said in a teacher's voice. Well it was a perfectly obvious question (And I had taught her not to ask questions like that). One plant had a lush set of leaves and looked to

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be several weeks ahead of the scrawny looking plant which was just beginning to send out tentative shoots. Of course, I opted for the obvious and she smiled a knowing, Zen-like smile. With one quick movement she slipped that leafy plant from its pot and revealed an almost rootless-ball. "This plant looks good, but it doesn't have much to draw from when the sun hits it." She removed the scrawny plant. It was a mass of roots. "Root growth before leaf growth," she said in a reverent tone as if the Buddha himself had said it.

Well, "root growth before leaf growth" was definitely heavy duty, and it got me started thinking about the art of growing teachers. I think I've been guilty of encouraging leaf growth before root growth in the methods classes, and I've seen those leafy, rootless, creatures fade during student teaching and die in that first year of teaching--flashy ones who could demonstrate all of those tricks I taught them in methods class. But once the four walls of a chaos-ridden school pressed in on them and they felt alone and cut-off, they said it couldn't be done. It was just too tough out there. It wasn't worth it or worse sometimes they just became like everyone else. They lacked the roots - the self-knowledge the solid idea of who they were both as person and teacher. Clearly a methods class has to be much more than war stories and cookbook notions about how to teach from those who don't have to live in the chaos.

Root growth before leaf growth means among other

things that I've got to start with them and who they are. I know there isn't much of a research base on the relationship between personal values systems or self-concept of teacher and performance, but I've got a strong intuitive notion that good teaching is as Allan Glatthorn put it. "The act of an authentic person who is able to stay real in an artificial world." (P. 37) Often times I've been frustrated about where to begin the whole process. There is a kind of cosmic-prerequisite in the methods class. Everything must be known before everything else is known. But thanks to that trip to the greenhouse and horticulture I've found a place to start. Feelings come first in the methods class because I believe with George Brown that there is a symbiotic relationship between learning and feelings. (P. 3) By ignoring or dichotomizing their affective condition from the intellectual concerns which I had for the methods class, I was making an artifical distinction which predicted my failure to really change them very much. The initial business of the methods class for me, anyway, is to take a collection of assorted over-achievers, bookish types, and idealists and help them become a supportive group. They need each other because the patterns of relationships in this class can give them important information about how they are perceived. They need to talk to each other, and listen to each other, and yes, even care about each other because they have much to learn from each other. This supportive group can be a

strong catalyst to their own personal growth, and a supportive group can keep them from being rapidly socialized by all those scarey realities of the field center where they will work.

Changing the methods class from a collection of wierdos to a supportive group doesn't even mess up my lesson plan. I wanted to spend several sessions on using groups in the English classroom. What better way to demonstrate methodology than to experience it. And so I become aware once again that my methods class really must be a model. Talking about good teaching isn't enough. I've got to demonstrate it every day in that methods class. We spend several weeks in group development activities and the class becomes a group and important helping relationships develop just like Gene Stanford said they would. (P. 69)

As I listen to them talk to each other about what a teacher should be, I am reminded of a recent article in English Education. Gundlach and Daniels make some observations about their own students and suggest that students in methods classes "are not foreigners to the teaching world but are in fact widely experienced, and even experts on teaching whose schooling has left them with powerful feelings, opinions, and beliefs about the job of a teacher." (P. 38) These previous school experiences must surface in the methods class, and be dealt with early. For as Gundlach and Daniels suggest,

"the largest single influence on the development of the new teacher is not what we accomplish in methods classes but the nature of their experience as students." (P. 38) Unless a methods instructor recognizes these unique school experiences which his students bring to the class and the extraordinarily powerful composite model of teaching which these experiences have shaped, he will find his efforts at changing them futile.

But these people in my class don't look like experts on teaching nor do they sound like it. Most of their "composite models" are negative ones: "I don't ever want to be like my 10th grade teacher;" or naive ones: "I always worked hard because I wanted to get good grades." Some how their models are lacking. So I remind them they are mutants and while their experiences are important and unique, they are none-the-less a skewed sample. They are mutants I tell them. How many senior English majors soon to be of the population. Most students in high school probably have very different perspectives about schooling. The mutants need to be reminded that many high school students aren't highly motivated and don't feel as they did.

There's got to be time in a methods class for all of this to happen. Time as Herndon says, "to live in there like a human being instead of playing some idiot role and time for them to see that teaching is connected to their lives and with them as a human beings, citizens,

persons and that they don't have to become something different like a martian or an idiot for eight hours a day to survive as teachers." (P. 65) To establish this living-teaching connection I believe it is essential to encourage students to become vulnerable by introducing their real feelings and thoughts and experiences in the methods class. We spend time with the "where have you come from?" question because understanding and valuing their roots is an essential beginning. And because they bring unique experiences which change my thinking as well as theirs. As Lynn Nelson suggests, teaching and the process of living are inseparable. (P.) We must not deny our students their lives in the methods classroom.

Once we have established a base of personal experiences some of which are common to all and some so bizarre that we all must stretch to accept it in that person. It is time to encourage them to direct their gaze inward toward themselves and become as James Miller says, "spectators of the never-ending drama of the interior." (P. 19) I know from watching other student teachers that concerns about self-adequacy and where they stand as a teacher are the first concerns they must deal with in teaching. And I also know I can't teach them very much about questioning techniques or encouraging response to literature or any other of my vast knowledge until they have resolved the fundamental question of who they are. I know I can not tell them who they are but only provide the chance for them to find out.

If I want them to be aware of their students when they become teachers, then I must help them gain a fuller awareness of themselves now as persons.

"To live an aware life, says Miller, "the individual must begin with an awareness of self. He must conduct a running examination and periodic reexaminations of the self - in language, the medium of farthest reachings, deepest divings, and most labyrinthe windings." (P. 114) The methods class is a critical reexamination period and the "Do I really want to be here?" question must be confronted.

It's time for them to begin keeping a journal not just a diary but a reading journal-a journal in which they react to things they read and experience. These bright, verbal English majors haven't really examined their own beliefs very much. And so the reading journal becomes a basic tool of the methods class: a monologue, and a dialogue; and they learn about journals by doing one.

In their journals I encourage them to talk to themselves to discover what they already know. As one student put it: "How do I know what I mean until I see what I say." The journal helps them to discover what they already know about themselves and how to distinguish between what is surface or style and what is at the center. They often write in their journals, in powerful and moving language about their fears and dreams. And they share their writings in their journals with each other and students respond in

supportive ways to those journal readings and awareness grows. And journal entries change from "I'm afraid I can't do it," and "I don't even know why I'm in this class" to "I think I know what I want," and "I think I am getting it together," and "I'm excited; bring on those highschool kids."

The roots are growing, and there's a new feeling of confidence among the students. There's a readiness and even an eagerness to plunge into all those content concerns of the conventional methods class.

The leafy things follow: the new ideas about language and writing and responding to literature. And they read a lot. Thank God English majors still read and are still moved by what they read! I try to pick books that rough them up a bit and massage their growing self-confidence. There is still much to be said for a student alone with a book.

I am often amazed at the intensity of their questioning and I remember that, it was precisely during this period of bombardment of new ideas and new ways of looking at teaching that I used to lose most of them. I could see their eyes glaze a bit, and I knew they weren't struggling with the new ideas, and I could feel them quit trying to integrate all of the ideas into some kind of pattern. Later on in student teaching I saw them teaching mindlessly as they were taught and acting like a teacher should act, and I knew the methods course was like a

vacinnation to them: something to be taken and forgotten.

They act differently towards the bombardment of new ideas now. They have a framework of self-knowledge to test these new ideas against. They think more and discuss more, and they probe me more and make me work harder to defend what I say. And in the midst of all the pressure I feel to provide teacher-training models which employ demonstrated competencies and criterion-referenced evaluations and field-based methods classes, I want to say once again that none of these approaches will make them better teachers if I neglect their development as persons, and if I fail to provide opportunities for them to gain the critical self-knowledge which is so essential to their survival as teachers.

There is a lot of leafy stuff to deal with in the methods class - a lot of "ground to cover." But the root growth must come first, and the methods class has got to concern itself with the person side of teaching as surely as it must deal with classroom management strategies and which grammar to teach.

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